



PROGRESS REPORT 2024 REEF STEWARDSHIP PROJECT



Towards responsible tourism practices

Marine environment consists of unique marine ecosystems that are not only sources for subsistence and commercial fishing zones but also support livelihood for coastal communities. Coral reefs are such ecosystems providing marine (eco)tourism experiences for visiting recreational visitors and rewarding livelihood for tourism boat operators and guides. Unfortunately, beside climate change related stressors, coral reefs are equally threatened by many other human-induced stressors. Unsustainable tourism activities such as stressors contributing to degradation of coral reefs. To address myriad threats arising in the marine environment different actors are actively adapting sustainable-driven conservation interventions and approaches. Coral reef restoration and capacity building on promoting responsible tourism practices.

The 'Reef Stewardship project' supported by the Rufford Foundation is such capacity building approach aimed at empowering the local communities, particularly those involved in marine tourism on key aspects about responsible tourism practices and enhancing authentic guiding skills among the boat operators, marine guides, and members from the Beach Management Units (BMUs).



Photo 1: Recreational diving experience, Yatin Patel SCUBA diving in the underwater world of the Kisite Marine Park. Credit: Ewout Knoester



Photo 2: Restored coral reefs in Mkwiro Community Managed Area within Wasini Channel, acts as new recreational diving sites. Credit: Ewout Knoester

Approach

To accomplish the project objective on promoting responsible tourism we conducted a two-day workshop involving 38 participants drawn from the local Wasini Youth boat operators, Kisite Community Boat Operators, and four BMUs (Mkwiro, Wasini, Kibuyuni, and Shimoni). With majority of participants lacking professional training in marine and responsible tourism, the workshop provided a kick-off point for many to get a glimpse of theory about sustainable tourism practices at firsthand. To guarantee effective delivery of the training sessions during the workshop, we engage personnel from the Pilli Pipa, REEFolution, Sustainable Travel and Tourism Agenda (STTA), and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) to design and develop training programme as well as content. The two-days training content consisted of: basic introduction to tourism, fundamentals of sustainable tourism, authentic guiding approaches, responsible visitor handling and management, basic responsible practices and operations, sustainability aspects, safety-search and rescue. The training were conducted in an interactive way encouraging and small-scale (open) group discussions encouraging active participation among the participants.

Capacity building for locals

Training session on responsible tourism practises



Photo 3: Sensitisation and training session in progress at Kisite KWS Conference Hall. Credit: Dzivula Gube

Coral reefs are often threatened by the excessive use by tourism-related activities. Unfortunately the capacity of coral reef to sustainably support marine ecotourism have not been quantified. Excessive use of coral reefs by tourism can contribute to collapsing of healthy coral reefs potentially destroying all their value as a resource for both tourism and fisheries.

A two-day sensitisation and training workshop was held from December 6th to 7th, 2023, with a primary focus on promoting responsible tourism practices among Boat-owner Associations (BMUs) and boat operators/guides in the vicinity of the Kisite Marine Protected Area.

Organized by REEFolution with funding support from Rufford Small Grant, the training was a collaborative effort involving various stakeholders including REEFolution, Sustainable Travel and Tourism Agenda, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), and Pilli Pipa. The overarching goal of the two-day workshop was to enhance the participants' understanding of the foundations of sustainable tourism and to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to adopt responsible tourism approaches in their marine tourism activities.

The workshop covered a wide range of topics, including introduction to tourism and foundations of sustainable tourism, sustainable guiding for boat operators and guiding crews, responsible visitor management, responsible operations, communicating sustainability, managing guest feedback and safety-search-rescue. Particularly, the training content focused on principles of sustainable tourism and the strategies on how boat operators can promote responsible practices in their tourism operations through application of sustainability best practices. This included:

- Tourism and its impacts;
- Sustainable tourism principles and the 7 core areas of sustainability management;
- The role of guides as sustainable tourism stewards and destination hosts;
- Ethical considerations in wildlife and tourist interactions;
- Responsible visitor management practices;
- Effective communication;
- Boat and crew safety;
- Ethical diving practices

The training was delivered using an interactive approach including activities for participants and informative sessions.



Photo 4: Yvonne Muyia, REEFolution Programme Coordinator leading an interactive session with the training participants. Credit: Dzivula Gube

Outcomes

Participant's key learnings

After the 2-days training workshop, we engage the participants on key learning lessons. Below are a few learning takeaway: -

- Participants understanding their critical role of guides as representatives and host at their destination.
- Appreciated the importance of effective communication and communicating in cross-cultural situations at a destination.
- Acknowledging the customer satisfactory journey and visitor management are also guide responsibilities.
- Broadened understanding of marine protected area code of conduct and about responsible tourism practices.
- Appreciated the need to encourage inclusion, particularly on gender equality since like fisheries, tourism is equally filled with masculinity as its dominated by male gender.
- Enhanced awareness on maritime regulations.



Photo 5: Awarding training participants' with Certificate of Participation by Judy Kepher Gona from STTA..Credit: Dvivula Gube

The output from the Activity

The training involved 40 participants drawn mainly from the two boat operators (i.e., Kisite Community Boat Operators and Wasini Youth Boat Operators as well as selected members from the BMUs who are active in the marine ecotourism ventures.

Photo 6: A group photo with some training participants and facilitators.
Credit: Dzivula Gube



Photo 7: Sample 'Certificate of Participation'

Media Outreach and Publicity

Safeguarding biodiversity



Photo Credit: Joshua Wambugu

Reef Rangers enjoying dolphins view at the Wasini Channel. They have been spearheading efforts to ensure responsible tourism practices.

Safeguarding biodiversity through responsible tourism

By Ruth Keah | rkeahkadide@gmail.com

Growing up in Wasini village, Suleiman Kionzo, was molded into becoming one of the prominent boat operators in the Shimoni region. A member of the Wasini Boat Youth Operator and a seasoned tour guide, has devoted 15 years to his profession.

His primary role involves taking tourists from mainland Shimoni to the breathtaking Kisite-Mpunguti Marine National Park. Dubbed the 'Home of the Dolphin,' the Park is located in the Shimoni-Vanga seascape along the southern coast of Kenya.

As the country's largest marine protected area, The park is a beacon of natural wonder, captivating tourists with its unique marine ecosystem, pristine coral reefs, and diverse marine life. Notably, it serves

as a crucial migratory route for majestic humpback whales, and has become a symbol of successful conservation management, earning the prestigious gold-level Blue Park Award by the Marine Conservation Institute for achieving the highest science-based standards for marine life protection and management.

Most boat operators from this area are not professional tour guides; they simply follow what others have been doing without proper training.
- Yvonne Muyia,
REEvolution Programme
Coordinator

Beyond its ecological significance, the park and adjacent locally marine managed areas (LMMAs) play a pivotal role in the local economy, sustaining livelihoods through subsistence fishing and thriving marine tourism activities. The Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife & Heritage annual tourism sector performance report for 2022 shows that the number of tourists visiting the Park has increased from 40,793 in 2019 to 73,922 in 2022.

During low tourist seasons, Kionzo seamlessly transitions into a fisherman. This dual role is common among many boat operators in the area who, like Kionzo, did not pursue formal education in tour guiding.

He, however, acknowledges that some of his colleagues unintentionally contribute to the degradation of the marine ecosystem. Their activities, such as reckless boat anchoring, unguided snorkeling and

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Photo 8: Publicity and outreach article published in MESHA Magazine written by Ruth Keah, Multi-award journalist - Winner Radio Journalist of the Year - 2021.

Biodiversity

Of communities and modern technologies in restoring coral reefs

Photo Credit | Ruth Keah



Members of a Beach Management Unit (BMU) make artificial reefs at the training workshop in Kwale County, Kenya's coast.

By Ruth Keah | rkeahkadide@gmail.com

Maimuna Aboud stands poised in her diving gear, prepared to embark on a remarkable underwater journey.

The dedicated member of the Wasini Beach Management Unit (BMU) in Shimoni, Kwale County, for two years epitomises the spirit of a health promoter determined to enlighten her community about the importance of preserving the delicate, dry land and vibrant ocean ecosystems.

With her sight set on exploring the restored coral reefs at Shimoni, Maimuna's passion for environmental education radiates, promising a captivating adventure that also inspires others to safeguard nature's wonders.

Unlike many members of the BMUs and boat operators, the main ocean stakeholders in Shimoni seascape, Maimuna was initially unaware of coral reef restoration efforts and the diverse array of coral species that inhabit the ocean. Thanks to REEFolution Trust, a not-for-profit conservation organisation that restores coral reefs and shares research insights in Shimoni, Kwale County, she now has what it takes to make biodiversity thrive.

According to Secore.org (2021), detrimental effects of global warming and human activities have resulted in the loss of more than 50 per cent of the world's coral reefs in the past three decades.

Furthermore, it is predicted that without intervention within the next century, up to 90 per cent of the remaining coral reefs may perish, leaving only a few pristine ones untouched by the destructive forces.

In response to alarming decline of coral reefs, managers, practitioners, scientists and conservation organisations have come up with innovative restoration techniques that also aim to accelerate recovery of damaged reefs.

REEvolution, Pilli Pipa Dhow Safaris and the local community working with Mkwiro Beach Management Unit have restored 3ha of coral reefs in the Mkwiro Community Managed Area within the Wasini Channel, and trained 15 REEF rangers. Over 2,000 artificial reef structures have been placed, with nurseries producing over 10,000 young coral fragments annually.

Joshua Wambugu is a social science PhD researcher who focuses on the societal impact of coral reef restoration. He says unlike tree planting which has been a long-standing practice understood by many, coral reef restoration is a relatively new trial, and poses unique challenges creating a small conflict and dilemma among locals.

In order to foster understanding and encourage active participation in coral reef restoration, REEFolution, through Reef Stewardship Project, a small grant funded by Rufford Foundation is now raising awareness and educating Shimoni locals about the significance of coral reef restoration how it is done and various techniques involved. This is done through experiential learning (training), where locals drawn from BMUs and boat operators participate.

The primary objective of the project is to emphasise the importance of preserving and rehabilitating coral reefs, while using various types of artificial reef structure.

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Photo 9: Publicity and outreach article published in MESHA Magazine written by Ruth Keah, Multi-award journalist - Winner Radio Journalist of the Year - 2021.

Media Outreach and Publicity

Safeguarding biodiversity

diving, pose significant threats to the fragile marine environment, including corals and other vulnerable species. If left unaddressed, these practices could lead to irreversible damage to delicate marine ecosystems.

For this reason, Kionzo was part of a training aimed at empowering tour guides and boat operators with responsible tourism practices. It was conducted by the REEFolution Trust, under the REEF STEWARDSHIP Project supported by the Rufford Foundation.

Yvonne Muyia, the Programme Coordinator of the Trust, emphasized that sustainable tourism seeks to minimize negative environmental impact, support local communities, and offer meaningful experiences for travelers.

"Most boat operators from this area are not professional tour guides; they simply follow what others have been doing without proper training. Our goal is to standardize tourism practices here and help them understand the benefits of sustainable tourism as a viable source of income," she stated.

The training involved 38 participants from various groups, including Wasini Youth Boat Operators, Kisite Community Boat Operators, Kibuyuni BMU, Mkwiro BMU, Shimoni BMU, and Wasini BMU.



Traditional dhow used for marine excursion to Kisite-Mpunguti Marine Protected Area.

Therefore, we have collectively agreed that every boat must have a code of conduct in place at all times, and all rules must be strictly followed.
- Yatin Patel, diving instructor

Among the trainees was Mohammed Kassim, a member of the Wasini Beach Management Unit and the group's secretary. With 15 years of practical experience in tour guiding in Shimoni, where he takes tourists to Wasini Island and Kisite Mpunguti Marine National Park, Kassim expressed how the training has equipped him with new knowledge on handling tourists professionally.

"We will now approach our work as tour guides with a professional mindset, prioritizing the conservation of the marine ecosystem including the corals. I have learned that by actively conserving the environment, we can attract more tourists, as they like visiting well-preserved places," he shared.

He committed to actively disseminate the knowledge to the group members, educating them on the proper code of conduct when interacting with tourists and guiding them on the appropriate activities within the park.

Photo Credit: Joshua Wambugu

Abdulaziz Hemedi, the secretary of the Wasini Youth Boat Operators, openly acknowledges that despite his seven-year tenure, he was not aware of certain aspects of boating and was executing some practices incorrectly.

"I wasn't aware of these rules, but now I understand that when I observe tourists breaking regulations, such as stopping on coral reefs, which is prohibited, I will first approach them with a soft warning. If they persist, I will escalate to harder approaches, including reporting the incident to authorities like the Kenya Wildlife Services for necessary action," he explains.

Yatin Patel, a diving instructor from Pili Pipa Dhow Safaris in Shimoni, said that due to lack of training tour guides are at risk of unintentionally causing harm to the marine ecosystem as they execute their duties.

"Despite the existence of a code of conduct, some guides are not adhering to them. For instance, they take tourists too close to dolphins or allow them to swim with the dolphins, which is strictly prohibited. Therefore, we have collectively agreed that every boat must have a code of conduct in place at all times, and all rules must be strictly followed," he explained, adding that it is their duty as guides to ensure tourists follow the rules and refrain from damaging marine ecosystems.

Corporal Juma Mando, from Kenya Wildlife Services in Shimoni, said the training is a platform to increase awareness of safe, safety and maritime regulations to the boat operators at the different levels.

Safeguarding biodiversity

Photo Credit: Captain Nyota



Judy Gona, Lead Consultant at Sustainable Travel and Tourism Agenda. Right, Mohammed Kassim (in white T-shirt), a member of the Wasini Beach Management Unit listening keenly to the proceedings of the workshop aimed at empowering tour guides and boat operators with responsible tourism practices.

"Through this training, I believe the boat operators and BMUs have recognized the importance of honesty. This will contribute to the growth of tourism, as guests will receive accurate information and, in turn, share their positive experiences with others, inspiring more visits to the marine protected areas," he said.

Judy Gona, the Lead Consultant at Sustainable Travel and Tourism Agenda, emphasized the evolving needs of responsible travelers, hence tour guides to align with the global focus on sustainability. In the context of coastal and marine tourism, she highlighted the challenge of finding responsible guides and sea adventures.

"Travelers today seek guides who understand the stories, values, and cultures of the places they serve, as well as those who demonstrate responsibility to the environment," she said.

Gona further emphasized that responsible tourism aligns with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly

"It is important that we all respect and protect life underwater. This is a critical component of our ecosystem and vital to our existence as human being."
- Judy Gona, Lead Consultant at Sustainable Travel and Tourism Agenda

addressing SDG number 13, which focuses on protecting life underwater. She urged guides involved in sea activities such as recreational SCUBA diving, dhow safaris, cruises, ships, and snorkeling to respect and protect marine life.

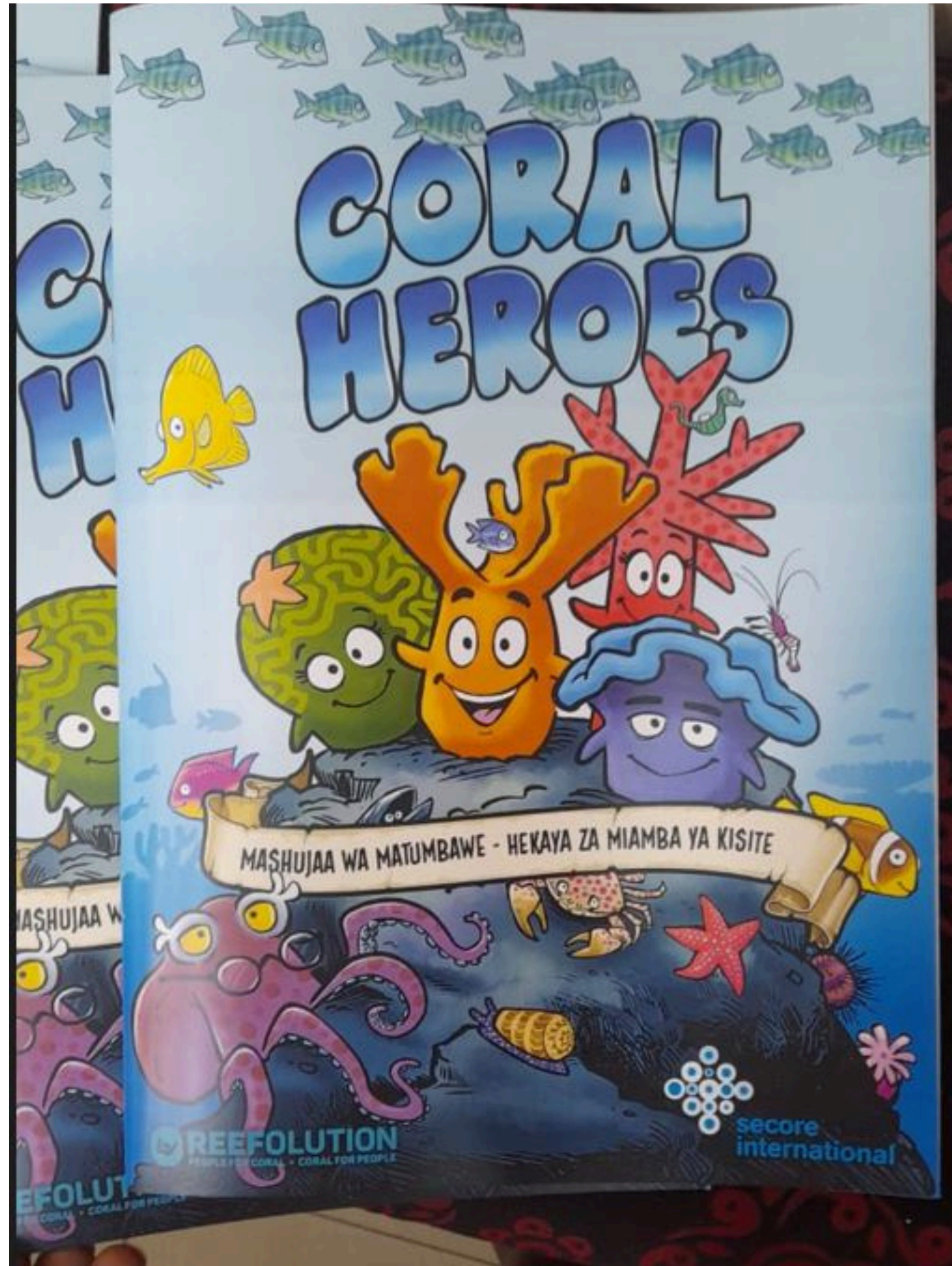
She stressed the significance of preserving the underwater ecosystem, emphasizing that its destruction not only impacts the food chain but jeopardizes the entire biological ecosystem, thereby posing a risk to human lives.

"It is important that we all respect and protect life underwater. This is a critical component of our ecosystem and vital to our existence as human beings," she concluded.

Joshua Wambugu, the Project Lead for the REEF Stewardship Project said periodical assessment on the knowledge gap and skills among the boat operators and marine tourism guides is critical. He said by understanding their knowledge needs, it becomes easy and convenient to tailor make experiential learning and knowledge training programmes, particularly on new innovation on marine restoration, responsible tourism, visitor's experiences and safety.

"Overall, it is great to see positive receptiveness, enthusiasm, and urge by the participants to engage them more, and have periodical interactive training forums that enriches their capacity with knowledge and awareness," he said in conclusion.

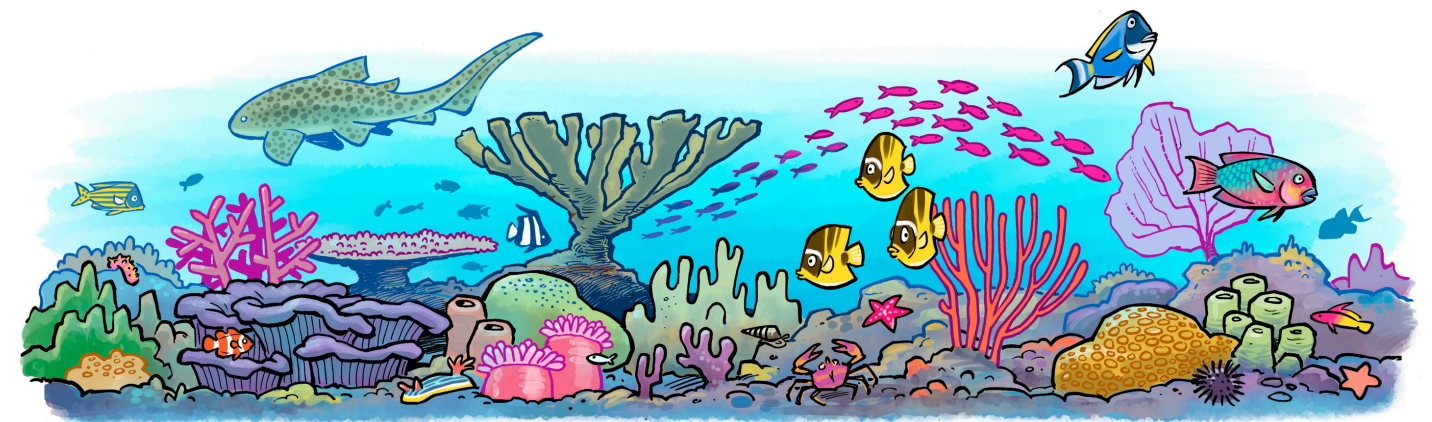
Advancing ocean 'coral reef' literacy



To sustain the ocean 'coral reef' literacy and awareness among the young learners and local communities, a Swahili version of Coral Heroes - Mashujaa wa Matumbawe: Hekaya za Miamba ya Kisite was translated and produced. The comic booklet is designed in a simplified way using artistic and cartoon-like illustrations narrating a comic stories about coral reef ecosystem, their value and importance, underlying threats, coral restoration as a conservation intervention and research aspects related to reef ecosystem and restoration.

This effort was achieved through a collaborative partnership between REEFolution and Secore International. In agreement with Secore, we produced a tailormade version, adapting local names for characters as well as that of nearby marine protected area - Kisite. The comic will be distributed for free to the local primary and secondary schools within Simoni and beyond along Kenya's coast including to the neighbouring countries.

Photo 9: (Left) A photo of the Swahili version of 'Coral Heroes' - Mashujaa wa Matumbawe - Hekaya za Miamba ya Kisite'



Graphic credit: Secore International - coral heroes promo material

Cont'd...



Photo 9a: Preview of Swahili version comic booklet.



TRADITIONAL DHOW IN A MOORING IN THE WASINI CHANNEL, SHIMONI

Photo Credit: Joshua Wambugu